

# GIRL ADVENTURER LIVED FOR SIXTEEN YEARS AS A BOY; "WHISTLING JACK" McCONNELL REVEALED AS FLORENCE GRAY

## DAUGHTER OF A RICH FAMILY

Gangster and War Worker Unmasked Proves to Be Heiress of a Wealthy Southern Family—Arrested on Charge of Girl Companion.

NEW YORK, Sept. 2.

**T**RUTH is so much stranger than fiction that even in the high places where truth is supposed to dwell alone, fiction is sometimes substituted when the truth might not be recognized. For fiction is plausible and readily accepted, while truth is often impossible to believe.

So if you go down to the municipal court records in Philadelphia, you will find a line reading:

"Florence Gray, twenty-two years old; assault and battery; Judge Brown; paroled."

And that is fiction—legal fiction, perhaps, but fiction for all that. For Florence Gray is not twenty-two years old. She is just eight months old; eight months to the day nearly.

Yes, she was paroled after conviction for assault and battery, but she didn't commit the crime. "Whistling Jack" McConnell of the Iron Gang in the Quaker City was really guilty. He was twenty-two, a lithe chap, made up of whalebone and whipcord, the leader of that pack of embryonic yeggmen that had kept the police cursing for two years. And now Florence Gray, eight months old, is taking the gaff for him.

### TWO PERSONS IN ONE.

Judge Brown will tell you that Florence and Jack are one and the same person, that Jack's real name is Florence and that the girl fooled some of the sharpest eyes and keenest wits in America for nearly two decades before her sex and identity were discovered.

That's mere fiction, because no one would believe the truth, which is that for sixteen years "Whistling Jack" McConnell roamed the country, doing a man's work, drawing a man's pay, fighting a man's fights and taking a man's punishment in man-fashion. "Whistling Jack" was arrested on that assault charge eight months ago, and then, when the police made him strip and bathe—well, Jack faded into nothingness then, and it was Florence Gray who faced the court next day and obtained a suspension of sentence on parole.

### PICTURESQUE PRISONER.

In peg-top trousers, pinch-back coat, purple-lined, elkskin shoes of white saddle with brown, Florence, who had been Jack for sixteen years, faced the court. The grin that showed the uneven teeth was Jack's, and so were the sun-scorched hair, the quick blue eyes, the calloused hands, the freckled, reckless face.

But Judge Brown had heard the report, and he consented to put the prisoner on probation only on condition that the masculine raiment be doffed forever, that the cropped hair be allowed to lengthen, and, in short, that "Whistling Jack" McConnell cease to exist.

The prisoner agreed, readily, though the words of acquiescence came in the harsh, grating accents of Jack of old. Jack was non-existent already, now that Florence had been discovered after sixteen years—and by the police, too.

A middy blouse, a short blue skirt, stockings of silk and all the other articles of feminine raiment were brought to the cell and donned, distastefully, reluctantly, rebelliously, and where "Whistling Jack" had walked into jail, Florence Gray walked out in the night, furtively, with hands that sought for coat pockets that were not there, with feet that stepped free and wide and awkwardly in the skirts.

### A NORMAL GIRL.

They kept the secret closely through the months, while Florence's deportment was under observation and she was compelled to report to the probation officer periodically. And she proved to be wholly normal, in every physical and mental aspect only she could not get a job. In disgust, the girl complained:

"What's the sense of trying to go through with this thing? A girl can't earn a decent living in this town without a lot of training and education and experience and recommendations. I just got to do something and I can't get work."

"Why, I went to the Vane Contracting Company and asked for a job driving a truck, just a little one horse truck and they gave me the laugh and the air. Me that's riddled the ribbons over a four horse team dragging gravel for the Vane Company a year ago and now they won't

"IT WAS GREAT FUN TO BE A BOY, BUT NOW I'M GLAD TO BE A GIRL!"



**A REAL TOMBOY**—Florence Gray fooled the world for sixteen years by posing as "Whistling Jack" McConnell, gangster, stoker, mechanic, truck driver, and freight handler. Frequently arrested, she preserved her identity until arrested for "beating up" a friend. The photographs show the extraordinary young woman as "Whistling Jack," the reckless gangster, and as Florence, the flapper.

trust me with one horse, because they don't know me. Nobody knows me. I don't know myself!"

### A BOY FOR A MINUTE.

So Florence Gray went forth discolorately and entered a soda shop to think it all over. Along came Charley Weaver, who had succeeded "Whistling Jack" to the chieftainship of the Iron Gang and he stared as he saw her. Then he exclaimed:

"Well Jack—and in girl's clothes!"

He roared with laughter at the sight and Florence answered him with a biting comment that carried a barbed fighting word in it. Weaver sprang at her and in the furious minute that followed Florence forgot she was a girl. It was Jack McConnell's left arm that guarded, it was Jack McConnell's eye that judged the distance and it was Jack McConnell's right fist that stabbed and jabbed Weaver's face with wicked half-hooks.

But it was the skirts of Florence Gray that interfered with "Whistling Jack's" footwork and Weaver whipped over a left swing that terminated on his adversary's nose—and it was Florence that went down for the count and then to the hospital.

So a few days after when she was forced to prosecute or be arrested herself, she appeared as complainant against her old gangmate. They sent him up for a year, but not until the secret, suppressed for nearly eight months by the court, was revealed.

### STRANGE ROMANCE REVEALED.

So the truth that was stranger than fiction—too strange to be made known when the courts discovered it—ultimately emerged to be accepted or rejected. Before all the details are considered let it be repeated that Florence Gray is a normal, wholesome girl, not immoral in the least, as the word is generally understood, and that "Whistling Jack" McConnell was just the same.

What amazed those who became interested in the extraordinary case was that in the rough life of the girl, her sex had never been guessed. The answer was that since she was six years old she had lived as a boy among boys, a man among men. That statement concerning the ruffling of ribbons over a double span of heavy draught horses was found to be true and much more than that.

"Whistling Jack" had knocked

**"HERE'S WHERE I FADE AWAY!"**—So might "Whistling Jack" McConnell bid goodbye to Florence Gray, who has taken his place in the world and who is finding the position no easy one for a girl to fill.

out a prize fighter in the ring in an exhibition bout at a Philadelphia theater. Jack had beaten picked swimmers in long-distance races, and had guided a five-ton motor truck and had stoked a steam crane and worked along-shore without ever a suspicion of sex being aroused.

### LET FLORENCE TELL IT.

But there isn't any way to understand the strange history so well as to let Florence Gray tell it as she told it to a reporter for The Times the day after the battle-bruised Weaver was sent up for a stretch. And this is the story of "Whistling Jack" McConnell as recalled by Florence Gray, who succeeded to the bizarre tradition: "I was born right here in New York city twenty-two years ago. My father was a Buckeye boy and my mother an old New Yorker. Mother's dead, though, long ago, and I've got a step-mother down in Asheville, N. C., with my father. I was an only child."

"When I was a baby we moved from New York city to Philadelphia and then to a farm back of Morristown. Mother died suddenly, after getting her feet wet taking me to a kids' party when I was two years old. My grandmother and grandfather took me then to Asheville, and I lived there about four years."



**"FIGHT? I HAD TO FIGHT!"**—If there was any pride in Florence Gray's voice as she recalled the exploits of "Whistling Jack" McConnell, she may be pardoned for it. A girl who could remember knocking out Kid O'Neill in five rounds, who could think of swimming three-and-a-half miles against the tide of the Delaware River to victory where men competitors failed—if there was pride in the girl's recollection wouldn't you pardon it?

"Then grandma died and that broke up that home and my father got married again. My grandfather took me away up North and supported me as he had done from the day I was born, buying my baby clothes and everything. We traveled on boats and trains, as I

remember, and I think we went over the United States, clear to California and back.

### QUAINT NOMADS.

"But people got to think it was funny seeing me traveling with an old man and they began to ask a lot of annoying questions. I got afraid that they would take me away from him, so he put me in a public school when we got to St. Louis."

"But people got suspicious there, too. I suppose we were a quaint pair, and people began to say it wasn't right that a little schoolgirl should be left with only an old man, and so some kind of officials came and arranged to put me in a home."

"But next day grandfather put boys' clothes on me and we went away again. We went to Chicago and took a boat to Detroit, and there he sent me to public school. I don't know how long we stayed there, but we moved on to Grand Rapids from there."

"I got in lots of fights. Most

remember, and I think we went over the United States, clear to California and back. He showed me through the Capitol and through many picture galleries. I remember in Washington I was on that stone where you can hear whispers all over the place. We went to Washington Monument, too, and all the other places of importance. He was good to me and kind."

As she spoke, sincerity sounded through the rough, boyish voice as Florence, recalling Jack, tried to pick up the thread of her wanderings with her grandfather. He, by the way, is James Gray, an intellectual, retired Southern judge of seventy-five years, manifestly a man of culture, whose softened, slurred speech is in marked contrast to the hard, flat monotone of his granddaughter.

One visualized him, as Florence spoke, of leading the child, who was tugging literally and figuratively at the leading strings, and seeking to implant the seeds of knowledge or the craving for knowledge into the gypsy soul of

wrote notes when I was in school. You know: Roses are red and violets are blue, and all that. Girls kind of hung on a lot, and I was always stalling with them to protect myself.

"Grandfather did not like this gang business, for he was scared I'd get into trouble. He thought they'd get me to do some job and leave me to pull the red-hot chestnuts out of the fire. He wanted me to be a gentleman, grandfather did."

"He was always telling me to be refined and what he called 'acquire culture' like my own father, he said, who always had servants waiting on him, and never left the house without a servant accompanying him."

### WANTED TO BE WILD.

"But I wanted to be husky and rough; that's the truth. Many times I got chased by the cops. I was the youngest of the gang that I had got into through a boy I played ball with, and the gang

man's trade. I used to wonder what would happen if I ever got sick or hurt and had to go to the hospital. Sometimes I'd think I'd like to be a girl, but I've been so used to boys and boys' clothes that I was afraid if I tried to change I'd get pinched or something."

This appears to have been the first feeling of sex consciousness that Florence could recall and it is odd that the sense came just as she was going into a machine shop to work—and:

"They sure were tough, them fellows. Lots older than me. Gee, that was a bear-cat of a joint! I was about sixteen. They used to challenge each other at lunch time in a ring with a regular trainer, and that's how I learned to fight good and how to stand a knock-down and take a lot of punching. That's what made me hard, all right."

### A REAL FIGHT.

"And when they saw that I could spar pretty good, they wanted me in the gang. They were rough, and I certainly got the stuffing kicked out of me. I had to go to a doctor to get bandaged up and I knew my grandfather would be wild, and I was afraid to go home, but I did in the early morning. You can imagine what happened."

"He gave me an awful lacing, saying that hereafter I was going out only with him, and he told me to try to remember that I was a girl and not a boy, but I had always been a boy."

"Yes, I used to feel timid now

and then, thinking what might happen if that gang ever found out I was a girl, but when I felt that way I braced up and forgot about it. I used to try to picture myself in girl's clothes, sometimes, but there was nothing to it. If I was a girl, I'd have had to stay at home."

### DRIVING MOTOR TRUCKS.

"But I'd learned how to run a motor truck by then and how to repair them; and then one night the gang planned to take the first truck that came into the shop for a joy ride with a bunch of girls."

"They'd always put the hard work up to me because I was young, and they always wanted to be sure I wasn't yellow. We came to a truck. I jumped in and found it locked. I had a switch key, but the steering wheel was locked, and then the owner came out."

"Hot Dog! There was a squad of plainclothes men on us in a minute. We beat it, and next night tried again. We pulled a car by breaking in a garage. The burglar alarm went off, but we got the car and changed the license and chiseled out the engine numbers and went after the girls and had our ride."

### NEAR DEATH.

"I was driving, and at high speed we hit a Ford and knocked it over. Our front wheels went right on top of it. A crowd came and the Ford driver and I were hurt a little. We beat it, but a boy and girl were caught. No, they didn't squeal. In a gang, you know, you promise not to tell, and you can't be a rat. If anyone gets time, they serve it. Anyway you don't give a girl your right name."

"After that we kept ourselves scarce, hanging around so as not to get the cops suspicious and we got away with it. I was cut up and a sight that night. Grandfather was asleep and I wasn't going to pull a baby face and wake him. So I washed up but he found out next day and soon after took me out of town again."

"So next place we lived for any time was in Brooklyn, when I was about eighteen. I got a job with Bliss & Company in East New York. They made shells during the war there and sent them down to Du Pont's to be filed. I was living with grandfather on Columbia Heights."

"My job was running a crane, first an electric crane on the inside that lifted iron from machines that saved them in pieces and put others in place. The superintendent of that department took a liking to me. He saw I was pretty husky and said he thought I could throw coal, so he made me a fireman on the steam crane."

### A BOY? NO, A MAN!

As Florence Gray went into this phase of her wandering, adventurous life, the middy blouse and the blue skirt and the silken stockings seemed to disappear and under the spell of her street patois you could have seen "Whistling Jack" McConnell, overhauled, bare-armed, grimy with sweat and soot, stoking a crane—and you would have wondered as the narrative went evenly onward:

"This was after the man on the midnight shift had failed to show up and they gave him the air and me the job. We'd run the crane down to a barge, load the iron from there and bring it back to the department that it belonged to. (Continued on Page 7.)

**"SO LONG, JACK; BE GOOD!"**—Can't you hear Florence Gray bidding "Whistling Jack" McConnell, her other self, a wistful, reluctant but brave goodbye? But she'll always carry his initials on her right arm—for remembrance of the gay old days of her boyhood.

the young one. The fertility of it never seemed to have entered the old man's mind; nor does it even now. But let Florence tell it:

"We lived in Washington two or three times. Then we drifted to Cincinnati, and I got my first job there, driving a grocery wagon, when I was about thirteen."

"I was big for my age, and I know I wore long pants and I was a regular boy, too. It was just a single team. Gosh, since then I've driven four and six horses right in this town, and never an accident."

"I always seemed to fit in with the gangs on the corners everywhere. I'd get initiated in the regular way—fighting—and I got to be a fighter, too. Sure, I'd go with girls when the gang did, so they wouldn't get suspicious, for I couldn't take any chances on that. Was I foxy? You tell them!"

### FLIRTED FREQUENTLY.

Florence's generous mouth was swept by a fleeting grin and you realized at the thought that "Whistling Jack" might well have been popular with the sex he scorned for so many years. Built for a dancer, surely, and quick as a cat to think and act, you'd guess. The girl is going on:

"I used to walk home with the girls when necessary and even

knocked all the culture out of me that grandfather ever put into my head."

"Once when we were shooting crap in Cincinnati, a cop chased us. He tried to get me, but I ducked and he fell over me. I ran, and he threw his night-stick to trip me. I grabbed it and flung it into a sewer."

"Soon after when I was shooting crap again, he jumped on us and got me and said, 'Now I got you, you little bum. I'll give you a nice long ride in a taxi with a bell!'"

"I went with him to the box and he rang for the wagon while he held me by the collar. While he was ringing I said to myself: 'You can have my coat for a ride, not me, copper.' I wiggled out and beat it."

"I could outrun most any of them. He hollered and started shooting, but the bullets went wild. I went into alleys and over fences and ran rusty nails through my hands scaling the fences. Grandfather saw the blood and I had to tell him."

"I was sorry for him, because he was afraid that every time I went out I'd get pinched, and was always saying that I'd be a jailbird and would disgrace the family. All this time, we never heard from my father nor got anything from him. My grandfather used to write to him, though."

### AGAIN ON THE ROAD.

"After that trouble with the cop, we went to Cleveland, and after a while I got a job as an apprentice machinist. I wanted to learn a